

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 001581

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR OES, EB, WHA AND WHA/CEN
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [PHUM](#) [SNAR](#) [SOCI](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: March For Life Focused on Forests Reenergizes
Honduran Environmental Movement

REF: 03 Tegucigalpa 1812

1. (U) SUMMARY: The March for Life (Marcha por la Vida) appears to have successfully launched a new committed environmental protection movement in the country. It remains to be seen if the movement can sustain its momentum and maintain political pressure on the government and Congress, and whether the Government of Honduras (GOH) will respond to the demands of the movement. Negotiations appear to be at a standstill with leaders of the March for Life, who have stayed in Tegucigalpa to press their agenda, demanding an immediate halt to all logging until better standards are put in place. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) The March for Life began on June 24, from four cardinal points across the country (Olancho, Siguatepeque, Danli, and Choluteca) converging on June 30 in front of the Presidential Palace in Tegucigalpa. Father Andres Tamayo is a Salvadorian priest who resides in Olancho and heads the Olancho Environmentalist Movement (MAO). According to Tamayo, the March for Life is a collective complaint and call for a united front against politicians who benefit from the projects of transnational companies that allegedly deforest and exploit the country's natural resources. He called on the government, transnational companies, and Honduran citizens alike to share in the responsibility to remedy the situation. Roughly 3,000 people participated in the march, less than the 10,000 that organizers expected.

3. (SBU) Among the marchers in front of the Presidential Palace were several members from a Center for International Policy (CIP) delegation led by former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Bob White. In an e-mail to White prior to the march, Minister of the Presidency Luis Cosenza Jimenez tried to discourage CIP members from attending the march. Cosenza cited as a reason the June 21 declaration by Catholic Bishop of Copan, Luis Alfonso Santos, that he would not participate in nor support the march because it allegedly would seek to undermine the government and ask for the President's resignation. He feared the possibility of violence and indicated that the marchers could be in danger. Other groups, including the left-wing Democratic Union (UD) Party and the Catholic church itself, minimized their participation. Finally, in a last ditch effort to derail the march, President Ricardo Maduro himself invited the leaders of the march to dialogue with him rather than march. He even offered full press coverage, so that all of Honduras would bear witness to the dialogue on this critical issue.

4. (U) The government went to great lengths to exploit its efforts to combat the problem of illegal logging and deforestation. A year ago, the President ordered operatives to control illegal logging in Olancho, Cosenza said. As a consequence, more than 100,000 board feet of wood were seized, several people were arrested, and vehicles and arms were decommissioned. Recently the operation was repeated with a similar outcome. However, these isolated actions do not properly address or resolve the illegal logging problem in the long term. Moreover, Cosenza stated, President Maduro has submitted new legislation to Congress (which returned from its recess July 6) to adopt stronger enforcement measures.

5. (U) These new measures include reforming the Mining Law, prohibiting the transport of wood between 6:00pm and 6:00am, and establishing a motor vehicle registry. Additionally, it would prohibit the auction of national forest lands, except for those agreed to by the inhabitants of the local municipality. The GOH also urged municipalities to establish commissions to assure compliance with environmental requisites, such as compliance with the law requiring the submission of management plans to the Honduran Corporation for Forestry Development (Corporacion Hondurena de Desarrollo Forestal or COHDEFOR) authorities. President Maduro stated that he would name a commission to intervene in COHDEFOR operations and (starting July 2), investigate the actions of COHDEFOR and its proposed reforms. Beginning in 2005, the GOH also plans to have COHDEFOR become a centrally funded institution and eliminate its partial dependency on the auction of national timber and fees from

private timber sales. During the past two years, COHDEFOR has been reduced from over 1,000 employees to fewer than 500 - an issue that has also reduced COHDEFOR's ability to monitor the implementation of forest land management plans. Finally, Maduro proposed to revise and strengthen the new Forestry law. (Note: Tamayo stated at the initiation of the March on June 24, that despite government promises such as the intervention at COHDEFOR, the reality is that the sacking of the forests continues and thus the march would proceed. He is calling for a total ban on any logging until stronger, more effective enforcement measures can be put in place. See below. End Note.) See septel for more information on COHDEFOR.

16. (U) In a letter to President Maduro, Tamayo along with other march organizers (Roger Escobar, Bertha Oliva de Nativi, Jorge Varela, P. Osmin Flores, Walter E. Ulloa, Angel Amilcar Colon, and Rufino Rodriguez) outlined the march's objectives and demands. Immediate demands of the marchers included the investigation and capture of "those who put a price on the lives of the participants in the march and in the fight for the environment;" an end to police and judicial impunity; and sentencing for the murderers of Jeannette Kawas and Carlos Escaleras (, the 1998 killing of environmental activist and Catacamas town councilman Carlos Antonio Luna Lopez, and the June 2001 killing of community leader and environmental activist Carlos Roberto Flores in Olancho. Post does not know the dates or locations of the Kawas and Escaleras murders. (Note: In June of last year, the first National March for Life began from Juticalpa led by Father Tamayo as well as Carlos Arturo "Oscar" Reyes. Reyes (23) was the leader of the campaign to stop the deforestation of Olancho. Shortly after the march, armed men gunned down Reyes outside of his home in Olancho on July 18, 2003 (reftel). There are allegations that timber magnates, frightened by Reyes' organizational capabilities, offered a reward of USD 40,000 to anyone who killed the environmentalist. Tamayo himself has received death threats in the past. End Note.)

17. (U) (Note: In May and July 2002, police arrested Jose Angel Rosa and Jorge Adolfo Chavez Hernandez, a former member of Battalion 3-16, for the 1998 killing of Carlos Luna Lopez. An appeals court later freed Rosa; however, in May 2002 police arrested him for the attempted killing of Sylvia Esperanza Gonzales, which is related to the killing of Luna Lopez. Rosa is still in prison on unrelated environmental charges. In May 2003, the Supreme Court ruled against a motion to dismiss the charges against Chavez, and he is also in prison. Former security official Jose Marcos Hernandez Hernandez and two other suspects remained at large. In December 2002, a court sentenced Oscar Aurelio "Machetillo" Rodriguez Molina, to 20 years' imprisonment for the murder of Luna Lopez and seven years' imprisonment for grave injury to Gonzales. In January, two NGOs brought the case to the IACHR. Three suspects are in jail and three remain at large in the June 2001 killing of Carlos Flores. Post has no further information on the Kawas and Escaleras murders. End Note.)

18. (U) Other specific demands that the environmental movement is making on the government are fourfold. First, an immediate halt to both legal and clandestine logging, as well as declaring a state of emergency in the forests by legislative decree and an immediate stop to logging for 90 days. Second, an investigation into all private property titles to determine their legality. Third, an immediate review of all forestry programs and projects to better align them with the policy of poverty reduction. According to march leaders, this last demand should also include greater community participation in the management and utilization of local natural resources. Fourth, a government audit on forestry resources to be conducted by a qualified international firm, which would involve the participation of the community and non-governmental organizations who are involved in the proper management of natural resources. Additional demands include the use of social audits where citizens can supervise the behavior of forestry industries and functionaries by means of regional forestry tribunals and the creation of an inter-institutional commission to supervise and control the wood industry.

19. (U) March organizers are not completely against the harvesting of wood. One of their recommendations consists of making the communities responsible for managing and harvesting the forest areas in their vicinities. March organizers also called for the abolishment of the Mining Law which was approved in the wake of Hurricane Mitch because, according to march organizers, it allows excessive exploitation of mining resources by unscrupulous transnational companies that make pacts with corrupt local functionaries. The marchers argue this should include closing the Office of Mining Development (Direccion de Fomento de la Minería) and replacing it with another organism that would attend to national interests before those of the international businesses. Father Tamayo's

group is opposed to the new Forestry Law for several reasons, including that it is designed to permit the private concession of forestry resources to national and international companies. The group also is seeking a separate law just for protected areas. They urge the government to conduct a technical and administrative purging of the regional COHDEFOR offices.

110. (U) Tamayo had consistently stated that the march would not "end where it ends, it begins where it ends." Now that the march is over, members of the national commission of the March for Life have said they will stay in the capital. They have said they are ready to organize the necessary political forces to bring about the completion of their demands at the executive and congressional levels. Tamayo stated that they say they are finished with unconstructive dialogue. The group demands that the president act now to address these issues in order to save what is left of the country's natural resources.

111. (U) According to march organizers, the initial response of the government was to send an unmarked and unsigned two-page letter to them on June 30. According to Tamayo, the letter purported to respond to each one of the specific demands made on the GOH, in a "we are already doing this" or "we already did this" tone and not addressing or referring to several points. Nevertheless, Tamayo stated that they accept the president's invitation to continue the discussion of their stance.

112. (SBU) Comment: Two of the leading presidential candidates, the Nationalist Party member and President of Congress, Pepe Lobo, and leading Liberal Party candidate Mel Zelaya, are from Olancho. During a prior administration, from 1990-1992, Lobo was head of COHDEFOR. In addition, Zelaya owned a sawmill and has been president of the sawmillers' association in Honduras. Neither is pre-disposed to support the march organizer's goals. The group protest was peaceful and demonstrated a cohesiveness that has put the Maduro government on the defensive. If the marchers continue to press their agenda, however, they could run into violent opposition by the powerful economic interests who stand to lose the most by greater environmental protection enforcement and any changes/reform to the current system. End Comment.

PALMER